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Iowa Drug Control Report Highlights Successes and Challenges

DES MOINES –A comprehensive new report submitted to the Governor and Legislature says Iowa has one of the lowest rates of illegal drug use in the nation, but it also points to a few potentially ominous signs on the horizon. The 2014 Iowa Drug Control Strategy includes statistical summaries, as well as program and policy recommendations addressing priority needs.

“Thanks to the good work of many people, Iowa continues to make progress to prevent and reduce substance abuse and the many dangers associated with it,” said Steve Lukan, Iowa’s Drug Policy Coordinator and Director of the Governor’s Office of Drug Control Policy (ODCP).

“However, drugs still hurt far too many Iowans, and we must redouble efforts to address current and emerging drug threats to build a brighter future for our children.”

The ODCP annual report cites several positive signs resulting from Iowa initiatives to reduce substance abuse, including:

- In 2012, the number of substance abuse treatment clients employed full or part-time increased from 41% upon admission to nearly 60% six months after completion of treatment;
- Overall, Iowa has the third lowest rate of illegal drug use in the nation;
- Following a three-year uptick, drug-related prison admissions dropped slightly last year compared to the year before, from 981 to 903;
- After reaching an all-time high of 62 in 2011, opiate overdose deaths involving prescription pain relievers and heroin declined to 52 in 2012;
- The rate of operating while intoxicated (OWI) arrests in 2011 dropped to 424 per 100,000 population, their lowest level in a decade; and
- Reports of meth labs so far this year are averaging 27/month, down from 32/month a year ago, and remain more than 75% below pre-pseudoephedrine control levels.

Among challenges noted in the report:

- More potent methamphetamine is being smuggled into Iowa in larger quantities. The average purity of meth confiscated by law enforcement last year reached an all-time high of 97%, compared with 40% five years ago;
- Among those receiving substance abuse treatment last year, 51.2% identified alcohol as their primary drug of choice, followed by marijuana (26.7%) and meth (13.1%). The marijuana treatment level marks a 20-year high, and meth treatment is at its highest level since 2006;
- The number of marijuana plants seized by law enforcement increased to 7,762 last year, compared to 9,824 for the previous three years combined.
- 36% of Iowa highway interdiction stops in 2012 that resulted in the seizure of marijuana involved marijuana from Colorado, a state that has legalized the drug, up from 25% in 2011 and 10% in 2010;
- The number of marijuana-related emergency room visits in 2012 totaled 932, or more than double the 455 recorded in 2006. Similarly, the number of opiate-related emergency room visits in 2012 totaled 874, more than twice the 419 reported six years ago; and
- In 2012, the presence of illegal drugs in a child's body and manufacturing meth in the presence of a minor accounted for 1,181 founded child abuse reports, the highest level in five years.

“Marijuana is the subject of discussion in the U.S., but science tells us it is much more potent today than a few years ago, and that raw marijuana is not a safe and effective medicine. In addition to being an addictive drug frequently misrepresented as benign, marijuana is a starter drug for many youth who go on to use other drugs,” said Lukan. “The legalization movement in this nation sends a dangerous message when it claims marijuana should be more accessible, because it does so at the expense of youth who stand to suffer more from increased drug use.”

In the drug control report, which contains a comprehensive strategy of prevention, treatment and enforcement, Lukan also outlines three overarching goals for the State:

1. Reduce the percentage of 11th graders who are current users of drugs and alcohol,
2. Reduce the number of Iowans who die from prescription pain medication overdose, and
3. Improve the percentage of Iowans who are employed post treatment.

“The health and safety of Iowa youth are paramount in planning a drug control strategy for the future of our state,” said Lukan. “When it comes to courses of action to smartly control drugs, I urge all Iowans to consider an important question: Is it good for the kids?”

To view the complete 2014 Iowa Drug Control Strategy, go to www.iowa.gov/odcp.

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